

George Mendrinos

Q: OK. Tell me the story about World War II, what happened at the end of the war?

A: Well, during that time, I was living on Academy Street. About four doors below me, it was an Italian store they used to call the [Mandalena]. They used to make their own wine; they used to make their own sausages, pickled tomatoes and pickles and all that. And I remember very well like the day the war -- the second war was over, see two cases of wine right at the corner of Broad and Market, and she was giving away to everybody for two days. It was a fantastic thing to see. Everybody was drinking wine.

Q: OK. Is there any thoughts you have, any other memories of after the war? Let me ask you, when you first start working, of course you can tell me now, I wouldn't have asked you then, but how much money were you making? How much money per week?

A: \$11.00 a week.

Q: \$11.00 a week?

A: Right.

Q: And as a grill man, working the grill?

A: When I got married, I was making \$21.00 a week. That was in

Patterson. And then I jumped from \$21.00 to \$42.00 a week with [John Tutulis], Elizabeth, that's why I moved to Elizabeth.

Q: I see.

A: That was the reason for jumping from one place to another. One thing was that the cooking here in the United States, it's different from Greece. In Greece, you cook one meal, and it's all of it the same. Here in the United States, I remember I left Trenton, I used to go Taylor Ham sandwiches, grilled Taylor Ham sandwiches. When I moved to Paraiso, they ordered pork roll sandwiches, and I didn't know what they were talking about. So I had to go through many different places to learn the -- what they call the different foods, otherwise I couldn't (inaudible).

Q: What year did you work for Ballston Luncheonette, on (inaudible)?

A: I used to be (inaudible) 11th Street, and I worked for Mr. Lambrose, I remember Danny and George, they were little kids running around, boots on the tables outside. Their mother used to chase them, trying to get them inside. And I remember Kiki, Kiki I'll tell you was a teenager then.

Q: So you were a chef? You worked as a chef?

A: Yes, I was a chef. That was in 1946.

Q: 1946.

A: 1946.

Q: And how long did you work there?

A: I don't recall how long I worked there. I really don't remember. Like I said before, I used to go from one place to another. I used to move a lot.

Q: OK. We will continue tomorrow.

A: OK.

(break in audio)

A: I worked very hard there as a dishwasher for about three weeks, and after that, I became a short-order cook. I used to stay overtime, working 12 hours a day. Then after I finished my job, I used to go behind with the chefs, so like a little faster, to make more money, and get out of the dishes.

Q: So you worked 12 hours as a dishwasher, and then after hours, you went to work with the chefs so that you could learn how to be a chef?

A: Right. And I became a short-order cook. I was working the early morning shift. Then, my wife got pregnant --

Q: Oh, you got married in Trenton?

A: No, no, no. I think I missed a point there. That's all

right. Then I got married, I went back -- I have to stop and think here.

Q: Well, you're in Trenton, you're working.

A: Yes.

Q: All right. Now, where did you meet your wife? In Trenton?

A: Then I moved to Patterson.

Q: From Trenton you went to Patterson.

A: Right.

Q: OK.

A: I went to Patterson.

Q: Now, what year was that?

A: That year also was in 1938. Same year. And I worked for the [Prestor] Restaurant as the second cook. And that's where I meet my wife, at the picnic, at the [Lemis] picnic.

Q: I see. You met your wife Esther at the Lemis picnic in Patterson.

A: Right.

Q: And you're about what now, 21 years of age?

A: I would say about 20, yes.

Q: 20.

A: 20, right.

Q: And Esther is how old?

A: Esther is -- right now?

Q: No, at the time you met her.

A: Oh, she was about a year younger than I am.

Q: So she was 19?

A: Right.

Q: And you got married?

A: Not right away. First we got married in the City Hall, so we'd have no problem, any question, to catch me or send me back. I had a civil wedding at the City Hall. And we stayed for about three or four months, and then we got married, full church married, with --

Q: Oh, what church? You got married in a Greek church?

A: That was St. [Anthanasius] George in Patterson.

Q: OK. So you got married in a civil way so that you become -- you can legally stay in the United States this way as a citizen.

A: Right, right.

Q: Then after, you got married in the Greek church.

A: Right.

Q: OK. And where did you live after you got married?

A: After, I lived in Patterson for about six months. I wasn't making enough money, and then I went to Elizabeth, New Jersey. I worked for [New York] Restaurant in Elizabeth.

Q: And you were what, a grill man, a chef?

A: No, I was (inaudible) carving meat.

Q: OK. Who owned that restaurant? Do you remember who the owner was?

A: John [Tutulis].

Q: John Tutulis owned the restaurant, OK. The New York Restaurant. And how long did you work there?

A: I worked there for about two years.

Q: Two years.

A: And then I moved to Patterson at the 42 Nelson Place.

Q: Oh, you moved to Newark.

A: Right, to Newark. Right. 42 Nelson Place.

Q: And you lived on 42 Nelson Place. And when you lived in Newark, where did you work?

A: When I lived in Newark, I worked at the [Seguri] shop on Market Street -- on Broad Street, I'm sorry -- across from the City Hall.

Q: OK. And what type of work did you do there?

A: I was the second cook.

Q: For how long?

A: I would say for about a year.

Q: A year.

A: You see, I used to jump from place to place in order to learn more. I wanted to become a chef.

Q: I see.

A: So then I went to Orange, or West Orange, and I worked for George [Coulouris] at the Greek Church Plaza.

Q: OK. How long did you work for George Coulouris?

A: I worked there for about a year.

Q: OK. And then where did you go?

A: From George Coulouris, then I went to (inaudible), Academy Street.

Q: OK. You left George Coulouris in West Orange, and you went to Academy Street in Newark?

A: Right.

Q: And you open a business.

A: Right.

Q: Now, you're still living on Nelson Place in Newark?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. Now, tell me a little bit about the restaurant on Academy Street? You're by yourself, or a partner, or what?

A: Well, I remember at the time, I didn't have no money. Oh, I missed something. During the war, I was drafted to work in the factory. I became a welder. I went to school and I became a welder. So during that time, I was working in Irvington, night shift. But what happened one time, my arm caught on fire. And I still have the scar. And I got some money from the insurance out of that. I believe I had about \$800. And I borrowed \$2,000 from my uncle Charlie -- from my brother-in-law Charlie, rather. And I went into business with my father-in-law on 45 Academy Street, right under the ODB. ODB was the government building.

Q: OK. So let me get this clear. So actually, you left work in the restaurant during World War II, so you worked in a factory in Irvington.

A: Right.

Q: And the time you were working, your sleeve caught on fire and burned your arm, and then you collected some money, the \$800. Then you borrowed some money from --

A: Charlie (inaudible), my brother-in-law.

Q: -- your brother-in-law, and you opened up your business on Academy Street.

A: Right.

Q: Now, tell me about the business on Academy Street. How long did you stay there?

A: About two years.

Q: Two years. Now, let me ask you this: what was it like living and working in Newark at that time?

A: It was beautiful. I loved Newark.

Q: Describe -- give me some details, you know, for example, shopping, living, your friends, [Glendie] -- what did you do?

A: Oh, as far as shopping concerns, we couldn't buy too much, because we were economizing. Even though I had a business, we had to compete with our businesses, and we had to give more and better food, so that -- so we couldn't make too much money. But we had very, very good times. We had a lot of parties. I remember especially on Nelson Place, Mr. [Gaboulis] used to live on the second floor, and Mrs. Gaboulis used to play cards almost every night. Used to buy clams and eating outside on the street, everybody was smoking cigars during that time. Mr. Gaboulis, we were sitting on the steps outside, we had a nice time. It was nice.

Q: So tell me the neighborhood, there were a lot of Greek in

the neighborhood?

A: A lot of Greeks. A lot of Greeks.

Q: On Nelson Place, and --

A: And West Market.

Q: Market Street. And everyone socialized together?

A: Right, right.

Q: And when you had a party, everybody was invited? Or what was it like?

A: Well, we didn't have too many parties then. We didn't have too many parties, it was -- money was kind of tight. But we used to get together and play cards, mostly play cards.

Q: Now, what about organizations? Did you belong to any Greek or American organizations at that time?

A: Not until I moved to Colonia.

Q: To Colonia.

A: When I moved to Colonia, I joined -- no, when I moved to Colonia, I joined AHEPA.

Q: OK.

A: I also joined the Masons.

Q: Now what year did you move to Colonia? What year did you leave Newark?

A: I believe it was 1955.

Q: '55.

A: I don't remember exactly.

Q: OK. Now, of course you have three children that I'm aware of.

A: Right. They were teenagers then.

Q: They were teenagers. Now, at this time, when you were in Newark, and also later on, you moved out of Newark, '55. What church did you belong?

A: St. Nicholas.

Q: St. Nicholas. Tell me a little bit about the church in Newark. What was your thoughts about it, attending church?

A: In church during that time, at the beginning, I wasn't too attached, because I was too busy working and too busy fixing my houses up. I owned a lot of houses now, or owned at one time, I had to knock walls down, and fix porches on the outside, and (inaudible) and all that. What I used to do, I used to drop off at the beginning, my wife and my children, to go to Sunday school, and I used to go home, do some work, and come back, pick them up.

Q: So you're telling me you were working very hard during the week, and any spare time you had, you fixed your houses.

You still went and took your wife and children to the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church. Let me ask you this now. You said you worked for a couple of Greeks that had restaurants. Did they help you at all? Just curious. The owners?

A: No, they didn't help me at all. I remember after I left the Greeks, I went and worked for a Jewish man. I can tell you a lot about that.

Q: OK. You worked for a Jewish man? What -- now this is after you had the Academy restaurant?

A: Yes. During the time that I had my Academy restaurant, we -- I opened another restaurant on Center Avenue, I had the two restaurants at the same time. Then I couldn't find the right help and I sold both of them. And I saw an ad in the paper that [Hugo's] restaurant on Washington Street, across from (inaudible), was -- I saw an ad that they needed a chef. So I got a job there as a chef. I worked for him for about two years, and after that, I became a partner.

Q: Now his name was Hugo?

A: Hugo Meyers.

Q: Hugo Meyers. And the name of the place was Hugo's?

A: Hugo's. Hugo's luncheonette.

Q: Hugo's, on Washington Street.

A: Yeah. We stayed together until -- we stayed together for 19 years.

Q: 19 years.

A: To 1962.

Q: And you were a full partner in Hugo's.

A: Right.

Q: OK. And then after 19 years, where did you go?

A: After 19 years, the place caught on fire. And we didn't go back anymore. We didn't fix the place. We went and opened a drive-in -- myself and you, if you recall, (inaudible) driving. That was in 1960 -- we opened in 1963.

Q: Right. Stewart's Root Beer Drive-In, on Route 17 and --

A: Hasbrouck Heights.

Q: And Hasbrouck Heights. That's right. Now, let me ask you a couple of other questions now. And your memory is fantastic. A little more about the living in Newark, and growing, and -- what are some of your fond memories of living in Newark at that time?

A: Well, I have a few memories that I can never forget. I didn't remember that -- my son, Dino, was born premature. I don't believe he was no more than two and a half pounds.

And even after that, he lost some more weight.

Q: What year was this? Do you know --?

A: That was 1943, I believe.

Q: OK. 1943.

A: '43 or '44.

Q: And tell me about that. Go ahead.

A: Well, I had been -- Dino stayed at the hospital for about three months. Dr. Antonius used to take care of him. He was in an incubator for three months. And Dr. Antonius told us that you're wasting your time, and my wife used to go and give her blood, her milk, tried to make him survive. But Dr. Antonius says you're wasting your time and effort, just let him go. But my wife never gave up, she always used to go there and give whatever she could do. And the boy survived. Dr. Antonius took care of him for three months, and we went to pay him, and he didn't want to take a penny from us. And that reminds me of another thing. Once in awhile, he used to come and see him at home, even with a big snowstorm, he would leave his (inaudible) his office up to his waist in a snowstorm, he came to see Dino. That man was fantastic, I can't forget that.

Q: Dr. Antonius.

A: Right.

Q: So that actually, if I hear what you're saying, he was saying to expect that Dino was not going to survive, and don't get any hope, and yet he told you it would be a miracle -- didn't he say something that it would be a miracle?

A: Right, right. And I couldn't even take him out of the hospital. I didn't have the money to take him out of the hospital when he was ready.

Q: As we know today, Dino was in God's hands, and we're so happy, because now he's Father Dino Mendrinos, he's an ordained priest, and he has his parish in San Jose, California, and we're all very proud of Dino. And also, I might add, very proud that we had a doctor such as Nicholas Antonius. OK, let's move on. Now, after you had Stewart's, you worked at Stewart's, where exactly -- what happened? You sold Stewart's?

A: What happened in Stewart's, Stewart's was too busy for me. It was very, very busy; I couldn't handle the business. It was very busy. And I sold it. After two years, I sold Stewart's to Gus [Dinakos], and my son-in-law, Peter [Markus]. And after that, I got a job at the (inaudible) diner, working part-time as a chef, and after that go home.

And in 1975, I retired and I moved to [Tuckerton].

Q: Tuckerton --

A: New Jersey.

Q: New Jersey. And how long did you stay in Tuckerton, New Jersey?

A: In Tuckerton, New Jersey, I think -- I believe I stayed eight years. Mystic Shores, at Mystic Shores.

Q: And then where did you move?

A: After Mystic Shores, I moved to [Tom's River] for nine years. And after Tom's River, I moved to Clearwater, Florida.

Q: And that's where you reside now?

A: That's where I reside right now.

Q: In Clearwater. OK. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about any other thoughts that come into your mind, about -- to get back to Newark, the city, how it was like? Did you have a car, transportation? How did you --

A: Yes, when I was working in [Riverton] as a welder, my boss had a car, and he sold it to me for \$50, 1935 Ford. I was going back and forth with that. And Newark was beautiful. I love Newark, because with so many Greeks at the area, and I love the Greek people, I love the church, after that I got

involved with the church. I became a board of trustees. And church was a meeting place, that's the only place I would get to know people.

Q: You were on the parish council? And you also did a lot of cooking for the church too, I remember.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: For the festivals.

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: I remember.

A: Yes, I remember the first New Year's Eve party we had, we didn't have no gas. At the last minute, Father Aloupis, somehow he called public service, and they came, and they [back up] the street, and they give us a pipe to have the gas. That's how we had the New Year's Eve party. Up to the last minute, we didn't know that we were going to have the party. We didn't have (inaudible), no nothing. But we had it.

Q: Father Aloupis came through, made the telephone call? And he got the -- you were able to have the New Year's Eve party.

A: Right.

Q: That's a nice story. Is there anything else that comes into

your mind?

A: There's so many things, but I can't remember them all.

Q: Well, take your time, as we talk, they'll come in. Now, Mom, she grew up in Patterson?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. And you have three children? The eldest one is --

A: Elaine.

Q: -- my wife Elaine. And then comes --

A: Dino, [Constantinos].

Q: Father Dino.

A: And then [Assemina].

Q: Assemina. OK. And they were educated, and I know they moved to Colonia, and they went to Woodbridge High School?

A: Right. Well, the reason I moved to Colonia was because I wanted the best education for my kids. And during the time we were living in Bellville, the Bellville high school had a very bad reputation.

Q: So you left Newark and you moved to Bellville.

A: I left Bellville, I moved to Bellville, right.

Q: Bellville first. And then from Bellville you went to Colonia.

A: Colonia, right.

Q: OK.

A: And then I was looking around to find the best high school that I can send my kids, and I didn't know too much how to go about, but we read in the paper that high school was rated very high, Woodbridge was rated very high, so that's where I looked for to buy a house, I bought a house, bought a nice house there.

Q: I'm curious, what was the feeling of your friends and relatives? Because now you're moving away, and that was kind of far in those days, right?

A: Very far. It was half an hour away.

Q: It was a half hour away.

A: Yeah. It was very far.

Q: To drive.

A: Yes. Very far.

Q: And now it's nothing.

A: Away from the family, because we had such a close family. Brothers, sisters, cousins. Very, very close. And we used to get together almost every day.

Q: I see. You socialized a lot with the immediate family.

A: Yes.

Q: And then you had a lot of friends also.

A: Right.

Q: And besides that, you said you worked 19 years for -- you said you were very good friends with him.

A: Oh, yes. He was like my brother, really. He was a very good man.

Q: And you worked well together.

A: Right.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about --?

A: I used to love West Market Street, all the grocery stores.

Q: Tell me about West Market Street. What type of grocery stores and cafenio?

A: Well, (inaudible) Market, Bertha was doing the -- Bertha was so good at the -- I can't describe how good she was.

Q: This was Bertha Manos.

A: Right, Bertha Manos. And Tommy, and all the others, little stores, little bakery on the corner, and next door the barbershop. It was --

Q: The barbershop, that was Degas' barbershop?

A: Right, right, right.

Q: And then further down Market Street was George's barbershop?

A: I remember Coleman's, to see the plays.

Q: That was on Market Street?

A: (inaudible) Steve [Dimandis'] father's grocery store.

Q: Liberty Food Market, that was Dimandis. Now, Dr. Antonius' office, that was also --

A: Across the street.

Q: -- on West Market Street.

A: Yeah. Charlie Coniaris with his optometry.

Q: And (inaudible), and also Pappas --

A: The [Court] Theater.

Q: Court Theater.

A: Pappas' drugstore, right.

Q: So it was a lovely neighborhood to live, and to walk around, and everybody was --

A: And the (inaudible) was the church for me. I loved the church, because this is the only meeting that we have in America during that time. Only the church. And I used to love and respect the church; I used to love it.

Q: How was the holidays? Like the -- like Pasca, during that time?

A: Oh, we had a terrific time. A great time.

Q: Do you remember walking home (inaudible)?

A: We used to go to church all dressed up. The girls, I had to buy hats for them every year, new hats for Easter.

(laughter)

Q: So you have fond memories of the neighborhood, and everything else that existed?

A: Everything was so natural, because you couldn't buy whatever you wanted; you had to save money, you had to wait for it. By waiting, I mean, that made it so much interesting, buying something. Now, you have the money, you buy something you don't -- you don't enjoy it as much.

Q: You had more of a goal to work for something.

A: Right. We had to wait for our paycheck to buy groceries, I remember that. But it was a good life. I have no regrets, really. I don't.

Q: You enjoyed where you lived, you enjoyed your friends and your company, and your church.

A: Yes. The only regret that I have, leaving my parents behind, because I was the only son, and as I was growing older, and still growing, I feel that sin I made to my mother, to leave my mother behind. Now I know how she felt.

Q: Well, you have to remember, it was for a better life that

your dad --

A: Right.

Q: Now, what part of Greece were you from?

A: Andros.

Q: Andros.

A: A little village up in the mountains.

Q: What's the name of the village?

A: [Ipsilou].

Q: Ipsilou.

A: Ipsilou, that means high, very high.

Q: Are there a lot of your friends from that area living in the United States now?

A: All of my friends in Greece died.

Q: They passed away.

A: United States, they're still alive. Like (inaudible), I grew up with him, he's still alive. I went back about five times; I enjoyed every time I go back. And now I have no (inaudible) to go there anymore. My mother's gone, my sister's gone.

Q: But you still have a lot of fond memories of growing up there?

A: Very, very, very nice.

Q: I remember you told me a story, because I visited Andros with Elaine, how -- tell the story about how you used to work and cut hair, and then go home? Tell us that story.

A: Well, I went to school for eight years, up to 14 years old, because it was compulsory to go there. And then my father was working on a ship, I used to see my father maybe every four or five years.

Q: And then -- no, you were telling me a story -- do you want to take a break, Dad?

A: Yeah.

Q: All right. This is very good.

(break in audio)

Q: OK, we're continuing. Go ahead.

A: What happened was that my father was working on a ship, you had to work so hard. And I used to see my father, most of the time, every four or five years. He would come home every four or five years. And every time, he used to come with the ship, and he wouldn't even recognize -- he couldn't even recognize me, because it was so much -- so long away. I recognized him because he used to send pictures, but he didn't recognize me; I was growing up and he was getting

old.

Q: Is that the type of life that they had, mostly?

A: That's the type of life they had, especially my father. My father, he was a man that he wanted to have the best of everything; he worked to have the best of everything. And we did have the best house in the whole (inaudible), we had everything. Everything. The best (inaudible) and everything else. So when I went to the ship with him in 1935, we -- I was supposed to stay on the front of the ship with the rest of the crew, (inaudible) my father was a chef on the ship, he took me with him in the center of the ship, better. And I didn't know how to act with my father, because he was a stranger to me. I had no feelings for him. He used to get sick, and I was -- he was a stranger to me, you know? That's what bothered me so much, why we have this village, it's my father. And later, once I grew older, I had this (inaudible) -- he was like a stranger to me, because he was never close to me. So, when we came to the United States, he felt that the best thing for me, to stay out, because of the war in Europe. And I haven't seen him since then. After the war, I learned that he passed away. He was a sick man. He passed away; he couldn't find the right medication, and he died. He died young. That's it.

Q: OK. You've had a wonderful life. You were a good father, a good grandfather, a great father-in-law. And we're all very proud of you. And any time you want to -- if you have any old pictures you want to give us, or anything like that, let me have it. OK? OK, thank you, Dad.

A: OK.

Q: Unless you want to say something else? Do you want to say something else?

A: I don't think so, unless I remember something later.

End - George Mendrinos